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AN ASPECT OF JUDAISM IN 1901.

WHAT is Judaism? This question, so put, may admit of an epigrammatic answer like that of Hillel;—otherwise it is difficult to give a definite reply. Judaism is the religious ideal of Jews. We can ask what were the prevailing religious ideas of Jews in this century or in that, what are the ideas common in one country and another; but the answers will express only various aspects of the Judaism which may admit of them all. Religion takes different colour and complexion from different environment. Moreover, those who attempt in the humblest way to think about religion must inevitably in some measure create for themselves a characteristic religion of their own.

It is sometimes said that Judaism, through the ages, has been, and is still, developing. But I do not think that the term “development” can be properly applied to Judaism. It is true that the aspects and expression of Judaism in different ages, and even in the same age in different countries, display certain variations. But this seems no proof of development, but of adaptability. To say of a religion that it is a development of an older creed implies a claim to something higher, nobler, godlier. Is it not a fact that the highest expression of ethics and morality is attained in the Hebrew Bible? And surely no words have since been uttered by man in communion with God of a nature so sublime as those found in the Hebrew psalms. As a familiar example of what might suggest a development in thought and conception of the Divine Nature, let us take the idea of Sterne that “God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.” Must Judaism,

adopting this conception, acknowledge itself capable of development? The thought of the Divine grace afflicting only in proportion to the power of resistance is anticipated in the Midrashic rendering of the verse in Psalm cxlvii: "He casteth forth his ice like morsels."

I would claim for Judaism that the Hebrew Bible contains the essence of the highest and holiest ideals; that later expressions, however lofty, have been inspired by its teaching, are reflexions of its glory. Variations of thought—the product of ages and environment—show a varying conception of Bible teaching, and I believe that the most exalted appreciation has not yet been attained. So that Judaism still remains the ideal. Have we yet fully appreciated and attained to a perfect conception of the meaning in the charge, "Ye shall be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy"? Or have we fully appreciated and attained to a complete understanding of the significance of the Day of Atonement? Have we a full comprehension of that reconciliation with God, as defined by the words in Leviticus xvi. 30, "For on this day he shall make an atonement for you, to purify you from all your sins; *before the Lord ye shall be pure*"? Human mind can never conceive a loftier ideal than that of being pure before God, in whose sight angels are not pure.

I would claim for the founders of Judaism genius in the realm of religion, for their understanding of man's nature and his needs through life and history. Religion is a gift; and a prophet, being specially gifted, is a genius. The whole world was endowed more or less with the gift; Israel with genius. This accounts, I think, for the immense breadth and endless possibilities of Judaism. It was the work of genius (the spirit of God) to create a religion which, with the development of mind, was capable of covering the inevitable varieties of individual thought. For I think the term "development" may be appropriately applied to the human mind in its growing capacity to

comprehend and appreciate the ideals of the Bible, and in the ever-increasing proportion of human intelligence receptive of the sublime teachings. In the genius of its founders, and in the understanding of its followers, lies the possibility of Judaism as a universal religion.

In attempting to write out my own conception of Judaism, I do not intend to say, "These ideas and no others constitute Judaism." I am fully aware that there are probably nearly as many aspects of Judaism as there are variously poised Jewish minds. Judaism admits of many interpretations: "I have seen an end to all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad." All that I wish to say positively is: "This is what Judaism stands for to me; this, to me, is what Judaism means."

The interest of such a statement of individual opinion is to a large extent dependent upon its comparison with other individual statements. Given the general environment and influences—if a number of Jews were to set down in words their own impressions of Judaism, their own ideas as to what Judaism means to them, what to their view it is, and what it inspires them to be, we should have a clearer understanding of a certain phase in the life of Judaism, and by the elimination of individual peculiarities we should arrive at a sort of general result. This result would represent not necessarily Judaism, the complete ideal, but the phase through which Jewish thought is passing in England to-day.

Judaism, to me, seems to lay little stress upon "belief" in the ordinary sense of the word. It appeals to me not as a collection of dogmas which must be believed, but as an inspiration and a discipline. To speak of any of our religious conceptions as "dogmas" is, I think, a perversion of the Jewish spirit in such matters. The definition of a name may appear trivial, but the fact that no equivalent for the word "dogma" exists in Hebrew is no insignificant evidence that there was no use for such a word. In Judaism, such conceptions as the existence of God and his unity constitute

the instinctive knowledge which is a part of man, inseparable from his life, admitting of no question. There is no place for a command "Thou shalt believe." Man knows God instinctively; he has no reason to say, "I believe in him," as if there might be a possibility of his being mistaken.

The idea of the unity of God is the greatest and truest thought that human mind has ever conceived. It means the kinship in all things high and good. It expresses the holiest ideal of man's soul, which hardly understands, but which responds to and feels itself one with the unity in all things good and true and beautiful. It is the conception of the highest, which is one—and which is God.

God and man stand face to face. No other being has any part in the relations between them. If there be godlike qualities in any man, there are godlike qualities in all men; and it rests with man to develop these by his constant striving towards God. It might be said that a God, one, infinite, and incomprehensible, is likewise inaccessible. But God must necessarily be infinite, and in the fullness of his nature inconceivable by man. Our thought rejects the idea of God having an external form, or that the fullness of Deity could reside or be incarnate in any finite being, however seemingly perfect. It was the same feeling perhaps which inspired the Psalmist to say: "Unto thee silence is praise"—the feeling that words could only lower a supreme ideal. So, any imagined form, though it may seem to draw God nearer to us, means a lowering of our ideal, and with it a proportionate lowering of our aspirations. We require something that must always be beyond us. What we need, and what Judaism has grasped and never relinquished, is not merely an idea of perfection to which it may be possible for man to attain; not merely the thought of a being to lean upon, a being to help and inspire us. (Such a one we find sometimes among human beings.) The God whom Judaism teaches is one who,—though we should arrive at the height of human perfection,—will yet be higher still; a God, our conception of whom,

extends with the growing heights of our attainment, and holds out the hope of a fuller realization through eternity. In this vastness which eludes him, and in his feeling of kinship, is man's great hope.

I pass from what I take to be a Jewish conception of God to the explanation of an attitude towards the Bible, which, as I understand Judaism, appears to me a Jewish attitude. The Bible is a discipline and a revelation. Learned books attempt to trace the slow and gradual steps by which the human race has climbed from humblest beginnings to a better knowledge of goodness and God. And as regards the Jews we know how in their case too they rose to a special knowledge, a peculiar understanding. Seeing that this higher knowledge and goodness are of God, and the result of his will, it seems to me that we may here legitimately speak of revelation. What God revealed to the Jews they were destined to reveal to the world: an ideal of thought and life, of theory and practice.

The Bible then is the history of this revelation. It records the message which the divinest minds in Israel gave to their people. Whatever difference of opinion may exist in regard to the manner in which God spoke to man sinks into insignificance in face of the irresistible truth that this message is an inspiration. Those who are familiar with traditional interpretation, and those who have studied and have been influenced by modern Biblical criticism, can alike understand and appreciate the greatness and goodness of the Law, the truth and sublimity of the Prophets. This, in itself, to my mind, is enough. But "It is your life," we read; and if it be through the Jews that the Law has lived, it is undoubtedly through the Law that the Jews have lived. We have kept each other alive—the Law and we. It was God's will that we should live, for the world needed us, and needs us still, though of the need of us both the world and we ourselves may be equally unconscious, and what the world requires of us we may seldom consider. We

were destined to live, and the Law has been our life. The Law has kindled and kept burning a lasting religious enthusiasm, and at the same time has governed and regulated it by definite rules and enactments. "Were it not for the fear of the government," said a Rabbi, "men would swallow each other alive." So stand we in our realm of spiritual life. So does the Law serve us here for government. It is our indispensable discipline. Without its influence (should the religious fire not die down altogether), the undirected flame would be likely to go astray and consume the soul wherein it was kindled. The Law, in itself a stimulus, yet acts at the same time as a sort of spiritual ballast, holding us steadily between earth and heaven. The whole Bible has this meaning and value to us: splendour of thought and inspiration, greatness and glory of action, unlimited wideness of idea; and all the while the holding of man within bounds.

The truth of the Bible records need not always be sought by following the literal narrative. The so-called worship of the letter is but the result of reverence for that indispensable visible form which has been the rigid custodian of every grain of beauty and truth. A story or an allegory or a Midrash is true, not through its concrete form, its absolute statement of fact, but through the idea it is intended to convey, the truth it sets before the eyes of men. The body is held dear for the soul's sake. No matter what the form for the truth's encasement may be, it has become to us as the form of one that we love, one through whom and for whose sake we have lived and suffered and survived.

This therefore is, broadly speaking, an attitude towards the Bible, the source of Judaism—an attitude which seems to me in character with the religion. It means a whole-hearted reverence and loyal allegiance, a whole-hearted recognition and thankfulness that by means of a book we have been enabled to learn, if we will, all that man can know of righteousness and of God.

A word at once on the great question of a life after death. I think the conception of an after-life is contained in our knowledge of God. It belongs to the idea of God's eternity. The conception of an infinite God and eternal life are inseparable. But an idea which, even in the absence of all evidence, would still remain constant, is an idea for which it is needless to seek for proof. Man, having no such conception of God as Judaism has, would still "hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing that's spirit." And in Judaism, before every religion on earth, there is no room for hopelessness and no excuse for materialism.

In regard to the nature of the life beyond death, it is likely that every Jew had and still has his own idea and his own desire,—and likewise his own knowledge that the unknown state must transcend all human aspiration. It is better—I think it is more in character with Judaism—that we should not consider any question connected with the after-life as a matter of dogma, as a "test-question." It is better, for the sake of the disinterestedness of goodness, that we should not look to it merely for compensation. It is best that it should mean to us completion, and a realization of that Infinity which, in this life, we can so imperfectly conceive.

Turning now to human life and action upon earth, we find in Judaism a complete identification of religion with life. As a matter of convenience certain days and particular buildings are set apart for religious thoughts and actions. But in its essence Judaism knows no distinction of place and time where religion is concerned; it knows of no deed or thought which is not bound up with religion, which is not involved within the general aim towards the highest. It may be said that Judaism includes much that is not religion at all. Certainly it cares for the body as well as for the soul; but it thereby elevates the physical life towards the level of the spiritual, thus making it one with religion. The ceremonies, the old traditions, the forms for the spirit's dwelling, serve, and I believe are

intended, to remind us continually how our daily lives are bound up with religion; how religion is not only a thing to be professed, but a thing to be lived. Thus do the ceremonies help in the hallowing of life, and serve Judaism for the preservation of the spiritual in its innermost heart; and guard against the world's onslaught. And they exclude a view of religion as separate and distinct from life, while in reality these are co-extensive with one another.

The recognition of this unity of religion and life has, it may be, brought about a condition of mind regarded by some with a lenient, half-disapproving amusement. It is that familiarity with holy things (verging on irreverence in the eyes of the outsider), a feeling of friendliness mingling with the fear and love of God; the sense of humour, so strong in the Jewish mind that being a part of his life it must needs be a part of his religion. All this, it seems to me, belongs to the "genius of Judaism," that glorious identification of life and religion, whereby man, in the familiar presence of holiness, can laugh in his own soul and lose nothing of reverence.

Only a religion which has thus grown one with life can be in harmony with every condition of life, or can be a living force for the elevation of an individual or a people; and it is this quality of unity which is rooted in the very soul of Judaism. Many instances might be recalled to illustrate the manner in which the genius of Judaism enables religion to gain a hold over the mind and heart. To take one example. At the sound of thunder, or at the sight of any natural phenomena, man's thoughts turn instinctively to God. Judaism perceived this tendency and fostered it, or, in the event of its absence, made provision for producing it. Again, Judaism perfectly understood man's nature in suggesting that on seeing an earthly monarch we should bless God for having given of his glory to flesh and blood. Herein Judaism displays perhaps the mightiest evidence of its genius; in that it binds up even the details of life with the great thoughts of religion.

In order to live this religion as it lies in our power to live it, uncompromisingly, with all its loftiness of form and meaning, we have to bear in mind and keep well in sight hopes and ideals beyond the circle of daily duty sanctified into religion. Judaism does not begin and end with the duties of everyday life. Its idealism does not stop there. It is from the heights attained by the most complete daily living of Judaism in our individual lives that we are able to see the vistas spread out before us and the end we have sought through the ages. We must not draw Judaism down to any low level of sight. We must not make compromises and defeat our own object. We must stand upon the utmost heights we can attain if we would see for ourselves our true object and goal, the "door of Hope" towards which we have turned continually in our journey through "den tausendjährigen Schmerz."

We know that, either by inner will or by outside force, we have survived. Whether, in any case, the life in us is too strong (for truly death must seem often preferable), or whether in the nature of things our aim must first be fulfilled, the fact lies clearly before us—we have never been able to die. Suffering and suppressed, such a thought as death has never come even as a desire. Some have seen an end in store and a reason for our existence, and have suffered from choice; others, perceiving less, have suffered perforce, unquestioning; all alike have drawn from a secret spring of hope, and endured the suffering and suppression, calling it "Judenschmerz," and taking it for granted.

Never in the world's experience has there been such another history as ours. We are a unique people on the face of the earth. We are members of the same race, possessing a common religion and language, but only a spiritual inheritance; a people scattered among the nations and endowed with imperishable life.—How can a Jew fail to be conscious of a great purpose, of

a special part to play in the world, a part made possible so wonderfully by these circumstances? Surely he must realize that something is yet to be attained, that something more is required;—that the life of such a scattered people is to be not merely a prolonged agony, but a holy power by which all the nations of the earth shall be entirely blessed.

There is, I think, our whole purpose expressed in the old phrase, "the Crown of the Priesthood." It implies the universal aspect of Judaism. We aspire to a great vocation. With all our power we must attest the still living truth of the words, "Ye shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." The Jews must constitute a kingdom of priests. This is Israel's place among the nations.

So far, therefore, Judaism requires of us three things, or rather, makes us responsible in three ways. In the first place it teaches us to keep strict watch over ourselves, body and soul, even if only for our own sake. It requires us, in the second place, as a priestly people and a nation of witnesses, to hold ourselves responsible individually for our good repute as a whole in the world; since we are always judged as a whole according to the worth of the individual, and since he that would teach goodness must express it in his own life, so helping its expression in the life of his people. Thus it becomes a necessary aim of Judaism that in every portion of the earth where even one Jew can be found, that Jew shall be found worthy of all that the name implies. What it means to be an Englishman or a Frenchman or a German is obvious enough. But he must be fully conscious of what it means to be a Jew; he must indeed realize in his own life and thought and work the one object of his survival. So that we may no more be asking as a people, "How long shall mine iniquity stand between me and thee?" (For Rabbi Simeon said, "There are three crowns: the crown of the Law, the crown of the Priesthood, and the

crown of Kingdom; but the crown of a good name hath power above them all¹.”)

Finally, Judaism laid upon us in the past the responsibility of the world's religion, of the world's ultimate arrival at the point indicated to us at the beginning by our special teaching. Therefore Judaism now demands of us the duty of playing a part in the development of religion generally, or in other words, in the advent of that fullest and purest final religion of mankind. It seems to me evident that, placed as we are, Judaism requires each of us to be faithful to this idea, to participate every one in the responsibility entrusted to us. The continual thought of this responsibility must be present for the shaping of life into the mould of true Judaism. We are priests, every one of us. There is no distinction between minister and layman in a kingdom of priests. We must all be custodians and teachers of an ideal of holiness for the world's attainment.

It is said that we took this position upon ourselves willingly, that it was not forced upon us. For there is an old story that at the time when the Torah was given, many other nations were offered the choice of accepting the charge; but not one consented to take upon itself the sacred burden of the world's ultimate uplifting, excepting Israel. We were given a chance of refusing. That makes our duty all the more binding. This legend seems to illustrate the fact that we Jews stand to-day in a special position, with a work still before us for which no other people has been so well endowed.

Since with the possession of Judaism it fell to our lot to stand to the world as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation; since we have been crowned with the “crown of the Law,” and consequently with the “crown of the Priesthood,” it remains for us to decide what nature of service Judaism requires of us. Is it to be a silent ministry or an active mission?

¹ *Pirké Aboth*, IV, 17.

The duty of silent ministry, of teaching by example, is unquestionable in every circumstance. Whether the further duty of active service does likewise devolve upon us through our spiritual heritage is a matter of immense complexity, but a question which Judaism in its fullness will not allow us to escape.

Dealing first with the duty of silent ministry, we must admit that very often and in many lands it is all that has been possible to us. Since our dispersion we have had few intervals of peace and known few lands of freedom in which to attempt anything but the mere keeping ourselves in existence, the staunch preservation of our Judaism. Missionary activity has only been possible to us spasmodically. Hence, while we have not been free to accomplish anything beyond our self-preservation, our duty has been clear: to keep alive the smouldering fire until freedom gives place for wider action. Our distinct goal in such conditions (and in all others) must always be a perfect knowledge and expression in the individual life of the highest form of our own religion to which we can attain.

When, however, the oppression lightens, and we find ourselves at last in a land of freedom, standing no longer in a position of self-defence, but upon an equal footing of power and prosperity with our fellow countrymen, then the question must strike us with all its force: "Is this all that Judaism requires of us?" Needless to say, the silent ministry must be still at work, must never cease for a moment. But does not Judaism involve something more than the duty of sacred silence in its cause? Does it not rather require all our strength in active service, and call upon its slothful servants to take up the burden?

It has been said that we have done nothing since the birth of Christianity. And we answer: "We are witnesses—silent, suffering witnesses of eternal truth, always waiting, throughout the tragic history, until the world shall have worked its way up." But is this enough? Does not Judaism imply a further service than the

mere standing by and looking on? The world itself, it seems to me, expects more of us than this; and what shall be said of our own conscience and our sense of obligation? Is it enough when the world inquires of us, as the mariners inquired of Jonah (the personification of Israel), "What is thine occupation?" to answer, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord"? Is it an answer at all? We owe it to ourselves in view of and in justification of our persistent separateness to avoid the calamity of not knowing the answer.

Are we fleeing like Jonah, our prototype, "from before the Lord"? It has always been so with prophets, since the world began, when the divine call came upon them. Moses, Samuel, Jeremiah—were they so ready to believe in their mission? Did they not contend with the gradual awakening of the incipient idea until the fire of religious zeal could no longer be restrained? Jonah fled from before the Lord, and had almost surrendered his ineffectual life when he awoke to the full understanding of the purpose of his existence, and rose to his true vocation. And it has been said that Jonah's mission to Nineveh is a type of Israel's mission to the world.

It may be that we missed our great opportunity. It may be that at the birth of Christianity, when the heathen world stood in need of a religion, we Jews missed our great opportunity, and allowed the compromise to step in (gods of flesh and blood for gods of wood and stone) from which the world has not even yet recovered. Herein, possibly, lay our great sin: that we allowed religion to go out to the world sullied and tampered with; that we stood by and saw it, without a word. This, conceivably, has made needful for us the centuries of our purification, whereas we might have averted the world's error and our own suffering. It may be that from the very moment of our destruction as a nation, our activity as a spiritual force should have commenced; that from the day of our dispersion, two thousand years ago, we should forthwith have declared

the Law of God to the utmost extremities of the earth, and wrenched the world from the grasp of falsehood. It may be that the world would have accepted the pure doctrine of Judaism and the sublime teachings of the Hebrew prophets unmixed with alien elements; that the millions now following other ways might have gathered up the ethics and morality of Judaism, and that the dreams of Israel's glory and the world's redemption would have been realized, and the ages of Israel's martyrdom avoided.

Who shall say whether we misunderstood our destiny in those days, whether we should or could have accomplished something besides the faithful guardianship of our great thoughts and traditions—waiting, as we have always said, until the world was ready for them? But whether or no we were blind to what was required of us at the crisis of our history (and “who is blind but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I sent?”), our mission is in any case not rendered ineffectual for all time. Perhaps we have wasted thousands of years;—we must waste no more in the same old mistake. Even taking into consideration the great work always before us of helping to alleviate the sufferings of our brethren in other countries, it is more than probable that Judaism presents to us now a further task in face of the full scope for labour in the outside world. This task would be in addition to the aid we have to give our persecuted brothers in their struggle for existence, the old purposeful Jewish struggle conscious or unconscious of its aim.

Probably the national character of our religion appeared at the outset to prevent the possibility of its universalism, and seemed to make the success of proselytizing a forlorn hope. Yet this nationalism, I think, need never have stood in the way of our mission, and it is against the whole character of Judaism that it should still do so.

Judaism as a missionary religion is free from the embarrassment which appears to beset and to be inseparable from the propagation of other religions. It may be said

that Judaism has one religion for Jews and another for Gentiles. This involves no inconsistency. On the contrary, I think it is of immense advantage to the holy cause of spreading the knowledge of what to us is the will of God, without at the same time sowing the seeds of strife and religious hatred among men. We are able to welcome "righteous proselytes"—those who are wishful to join the Jewish brotherhood and to attach themselves thereto by the sacred yoke which binds the home-born Jew to Judaism. But we draw a line of demarcation between the laws which are distinctly racial or historic observances, and the laws which we believe to be binding upon all the children of men. Those historic observances are to us memories of the past; they are very dear: they are memories of love. To the proselyte they would not appeal. We therefore do not say: "If you would join our religious brotherhood you must believe this and that; you must observe our Passover; you must mourn with us on the ninth of Ab." But we say: "The Lord is One. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might. The Lord is the God of the spirits of all flesh. Fear God and keep his commandments, moral and physical. Love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus is the religion we observe, the religion we teach.

The Prophets have defined the teaching which it is Israel's mission to spread. To me it seems that the idea which generally dominates the proselytising agent—that of imposing upon the convert a religious code replete with traditional observances and dogmatic articles of belief—is unsupported by any teaching of our Bible, and is moreover impossible. Most races have some traditional commemorations, which they should be free to preserve and to reverence and to sanctify. These Judaism is justified in respecting. We know what religious persecution means. We hold the Bible aloft, but we may never grasp it in one hand and the sword in the other. Thus, again, I consider

Judaism is able to hold a unique position in the world as a missionary religion.

But I will not here enter into the difficult question of how far Judaism at the present time can and ought to pursue its course as a missionary religion to the world. Manfully faced the question must be. Judaism claims of us a full decision as to the entire life which constitutes it, as to its complete purpose and scope, and as to the means which we should take to bring that purpose, so far as it lies within our human power, to the best and speediest realization.

There are, without doubt, means we should adopt at once to help ourselves to an appreciation of our religion. We should give ourselves an opportunity for appreciation by becoming competent to take up some attitude towards it. For instance, one most important factor is, I think, the knowledge of Hebrew—the growing up of that knowledge side by side with the knowledge of our native tongue. It is essential for the thorough understanding of our literature and the appreciation of our public worship. Familiarity with the language is necessary for an adequate perception of the spirit of our religion and of the true and full meaning of the great works written in Hebrew. Moreover for us, as a religious fellowship with a mission to perform, it is not only helpful, it is indispensable that we should preserve a means of communication with our brethren all the world over; and that we should have a common language of prayer to bind us religiously all the more closely together.

In conclusion, then, whatever our decision in regard to our mission may be, as a religion for our individual lives and an ideal for the world's attainment, Judaism stands secure and supreme. It claims allegiance as a complete religion, including within its compass every aspect and circumstance of human life. It is, I think, a religion that man may carry with him in all his actions and thoughts and aspirations. It dominates and idealizes them. It is

in harmony with his life as a member of a family, a city and a state. It is not only indeed in harmony with these various parts of life, but it binds them together and gives them unity. And to me it appears the religion, or rather shall I say the life, towards which all communities (Jews included) are striving through their various compromises and weaknesses. It is a life of unity, in which man may never say, "This is my religious, this is my secular life"; but, "This, my life, spent righteously, is Judaism." It seems to me the life of harmony, in which one need never think, "This is Oriental and in conflict with our Western ideas"; but, "Herein life is made doubly beautiful, glowing with the colour and poetry of the East amid the colder, calmer Western hues." (And here again is a symbol of universalism.) So that, working step by step in our vocation, attaining stage by stage the accomplishment of the mission of Judaism, we shall never forget "the rock whence we were hewn"—even when our spiritual inheritance extends from the Dan to the Beersheba of the world, and from the other side of Jordan to the Great Sea.

Then in the secret heart of Judaism there will still be living an unquenchable hope. In the remote ages beyond our sight Judaism will look to it that there will stand a spiritual centre for the world, "and all nations shall flow to it"; and it shall be called Zion, the holy one of the Lord.

NINA DAVIS.